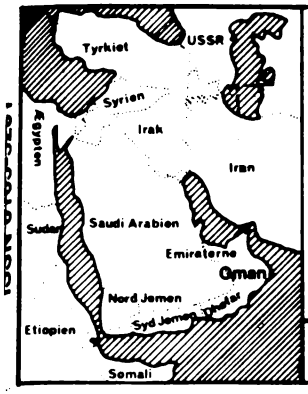

DHOFAR LETTER

News from Oman

Special Issue 7 February 1978

1. THE REVOLUTION IS ALIVE

In December 1975 Qaboos declared, that the Omani revolution was defeated, and since then, this assertion has often been repeated, and in economic magazines you can read about peace and progress in Oman.

Its true, that the Peoples Front for the Liberation of Oman suffered a serious military setback in the last months of 1975, but the destiny of a revolution is not decided in a single battle, and the continued presence of thousands of Iranian and British troops in Dhofar, is a proof, that not even the imperialists believe their own propaganda.

Parts of the Peoples Army are still operating in the eastern parts of Dhofar and in the border area in Democratic Yemen the revolution is gaining strength to the future struggles.

Below we bring an eywittnes report made by representatives from the solidarity work, who visited the PFLO in the border area of Democratic Yemen in December 1977.

AMONG THE OMANI REFUGEES IN DEMOCRATIC YEMEN

In the border area of PDRY, there is today 3-5.ooo Omani refugees. Some live in AlGheida, the main city of 6'th Govenorate(15o kilometers from the border), and the rest lives close to the border, near the town Hauf.

In general the whole 6. Govenerate is a barren, dry desert area, with almost no agriculture and also very limited possibilities for raising animals. Only in the far eastern part, the mountain range of Dhofar continues more that loo kilometers into Yemen along the shore, and part of the way receive moonsoon rain. But all along the coast you will find some of the best fishing in the world and many people depend on this

for the main part of their income.

As for communication with the rest of the country: most goods are tran ported by ship to AlGheida or Hauf, larger equipment is sent by lorry (there are no roads but it is possible to travel in the wadis) as they can not be unloaded in the small harbour of AlGheida. Besides there is several planes a week, civilian and military.

ALGHEIDA

The main city of the 6. Govenarate is a large village, spreading over a wide area. The houses seems to be distributed at random, without any roads between. In a lower area, there is a small lake made by the heavy rains last year, and close to here is also some cultivated land.

There are electricity in many houses, allthough only between 6 pm and 11 pm and somewhat unreliable.

Recently there have been build a modern Yemeni hospital with 85 beds, paid by Kuwait, but it is not really used yet because they are awaiting a GDR-medical mission to manage it.

In 1977 was opened the first Secondary school in 6. Govenorate, paid by Libya.

There are approximatly lo.ooo inhabitants in the town, of which 1-2.ooo Omanis.

We speak to one of the PFLO-leaders, member of the Central Ecexutive Committee, Mohammed Ahmed. He acknowledge that the revolution is passing through a difficult phase, especially their military strenght compared with that of the enemy is not as before.

Since November 1975, PFLO have been rebuilding their organization on all levels: Military , politically and economical. Military with the introduction of more advanced weapons and better training, and politically with discussions and studies of the experiences of the past and of the new strategy and the new forms of organization charecteristic of the future. Especially important in this process is the creation of new cadres, to replace their terrible losses. They also try to explain the previous faults of the revolution and the present situation to the people.

We speak to Captain Rabbia Awadh, a former staff officer of the Sultans forces, who in the middle of 1977 joined the revolution. He gives us a clear picture of the continued presence of foreign troops in Oman, and especially Dhofar(see Dhofar Letter. Special Issue No 8 for details about this).

He tells, that allthough the regime outwardly claim to have ended the revolution, the whole mobilization of the army is based on the fact, that the revolution is still in existence. The soldiers are told that they shall be ready to enter a war, and perhaps a different kind, than the one they have been fighting. They are taught by their British trainers that most of the people still symphatize with the revolution.

THE SCHOOLS OF REVOLUTION

One day we visit the Schools of Revolution which is situated 5-8 kilometers from AlGheida. There is no road to there, only a track full of holes.

Its much larger than we imagened, with groups of low buildings spread over a wide area, with football-fields between.

Recently an old well with good drinking water, have been rediscovered close to the schools and now they are establishing a water bassin above the schools in the hills. They will pump the water to the bassin with a motor pump, and from there it will flow to the various sections of the schools.

Everything is kept clean, and in the last years there have been a considerable decline in the number of sick children. The life of the pupils are simple, they live about 7 persons in a room of app. 2o square meters. The only 'furniture' is the rolled up sponge mattresses and a small bag or box for each pupil with the personal belongings. Its a problem that the pupils are bitten by all sorts of insects at night.

The food is monatonous: Rice with onions and tomato pasta and sometimes fish, seldom meat. Vegetables are rare here. The food is cooked in big pots over an open fire and is consumed with the bare hand from the plates.

There is a nice library/reading room, where 3o-4o children are occupied studying Saut Al Thawra(Voice of the Revolution/The PFLO magazine) just published and other litterature.

The schools are divided in 2 sections: 'The Peoples School', which is a primary school and '9'th June School' which is an intermediary school, but administrative and physically they are integrated.

Today there are 55o pupils staying on the schools, of which 6o are girls. 47 pupils are following the education in the new Yemeni Secondary school in AlGheida on 1st year. And further loo pupils stay in other govenorates and follow the secondary education there, and there is a number in High school in Aden and at universities abroad.

Its a problem, that the recruitment of new pupils have been limited in the last 2 years after the loss of the liberated areas, and it is especially a problem, that one of the imidiate effects of the military setback was a demobilization of many women/girls who tended to fall back in the traditional role as wifes. This tendency has been felt not only in the schools but also(and even more) in the army. Now the Front have taken meausures to counter this by strenghtening the Omani Womens Organization(OWO) and by making a new law, that forbids girls to marry before they have completed the secondary school.

The curriculum in some respects is modified to suit into the Yemeni one, because the Yemini education system function as a superstructure to the Schools of Revolution, but further there are 1-2 hours of political education and 3 hours for political meetings on various subjects, and during summer holliday the pupils receive military education in the military camp.

Schoolbooks come from the progressive Arab countries, except that the history of Oman and the Gulf area is taught from the PFLO's own book.

Its an example of international solidarity, that of 14 teachers 9 are from Palestine, from Fatah and PFLP, and 1 from Bahrain. More teachers should have arrived from Bahrain, but was kept back by the government, so there is a lack of teachers this year. From next year the dependency on international supplies of teachers will be less, because it has been decided to let Omani students, who complete

the high school, teach for 1 year on the school before they are sent abroad to continue their studies.

Most children are sons or daughters of the martyrs of the revolution, and there is hardly any who have not lost members of their family in the struggle. This gives them strong links to the revolution, and there are examples of families joining the regime, while their children refuse to leave the revolution.

In the evening the choir of the schools gave a performance of revolutionary Omani songs and music. This choir is an important element in the work to continue and develop a national Omani culture.

OMANI WOMENS ORGANIZATION

Several times we meet with the Omani Womens Organization(OWO). The organization was established in late 1975, after a decission of the 4'th congress of the Front in 1974, but have up till now faced a lot of difficulties.

From an early time in the revolution, women have played a very important role in the struggle against imperialism. Hundreds of young women have received military training and have been fighting the British and Iranian on equal terms with men. Some women have played a leading role in the armed struggle, and many have been martyred and imprisoned. But in spite of this role, no women have yet been among the leading political cadres of the front or been a member of the Central Committee. This is mainly due to the lack of education and political experience among the women. While in the 5o's and 6o's thousands of male Dhofaries emigrated to the Gulf states to work, and here received various education and political organizing experiences, revolutionary women had their first political experience when joining the revolution and their first elementary education in the peoples army.

OWO was established to change this situation, to promote politization and education among Omani women. This is done, because the emancipation of women is a precondition for their participation in the struggle for the liberation of Oman on all levels(which again is a precondition for the real and full liberation of women). The establishing of OWO coincided with a very critical periode of the revolution, the military setback in the end of 1975, which confused a

lot of people and tended to demobilize a number of women, who left the army and schools to get married, now that the urgent daily military pressure had stopped(this is for the situation in the border area, in the east of Dhofar women still play an important role in the army). Therefore OWO is still only at the beginning of its work, and needs badly educated cadres.

The work of OWO today can be divided into two main categories: 1) Work in the border area, and 2) External work.

1) The organization arrange meetings and cultural activities to mobilize the women, and they are responsible for the illiteracy classes(for the moment approximatly 6o women follow the education 2 hours every day), where the teaching is done by Omani pupils from the secondary school.

OWO also helped the families to construct shelters in the refugee camp near AlGheida, and they have arranged that somebody look after the children for the widows of the martyrs.

In all this they try to reach as many families as possible, visit them and talk with them, a very difficult task because of the dispersed population.

In the first half of 1978 is planned a major breakthrough in the work of OWO, with the establishing of a Womens Cultural Centre. This will house most of the activities of OWO, old as well as quite new, such as the establisment of a Kindergarden and maternity ward and a sewing workshop. Here the 2o sewing maschines, recently sent by Emmaus Fnysinge are to be placed.

2) An important task for the womens organization is the creation and maintanance of relations with other women organizations on the Arab and international level, as an important way to promote the cause of the Omani revolution(se below for more details on this strategy).

THE REFUGEE CAMP

A few kilometers from AlGheida, we find the remains of the Omani refugee camp. After the heavy imperialist bombardements in late 1975 against the Hauf area, thousands of Omanis fled to AlGheida, and of these about loo families settled in the camp. Now most of them have moved back to the Hauf area and during the last heavy rain most of the camp was washed away. Today there are only about

6o people left, living in small houses build of wooden boxes and covered with tent canvas or similiar. In the camp is a big shelter made by OWO, where there is illiteracy classes for the women, who because they have several children, cannot follow the education in AlGheida.

THE MARTYR FATMA GHANANAH HOSPITAL

In the town of AlGheida we visit the main center of the Omani health system, the Fatma Ghananah Hospital, named after a famous female martyr

Its a group of low buildings, which earlier have been used by the British for some sort of military instalation. The hospital has its own supply of electricity and is clean and well-functioning. The hospital is run by the Omani Red Crescent(ORC) with the help of a Cuban mission of 5 specialist doctors, laboratory staff and technicians. The Cubans do a great job in educating the Omani nurses and train laboratory staff, X-ray technicians etc.

Except for heart operations, all sorts of operations can be done on the Ghananah hospital with high standard, and because of this also the Yemeni hospital transfer all their serious operations to the Omani hospitals(For a detailed account of the work on the hospital, see the Report published by KROAG in July 1977, still obtainable from KROAG, or see Dhofar Letter No 28, 1977).

OMANI YOUTH ORGANIZATION

While we are in AlGheida the first Congress of the Omani Youth Organization is held, with delegates from other youth organizations in PDRY, Libya, Iraq, Sovjet, Vietnam and POLESARIO. Its characteristical, that this organization as well as OWO and the Students organization put great emphazis on external relations: establishing relations with related organizations mainly in other Arab countries and within the socialist camp, participate in congresses etc. The aim of this policy is to manifest the existence of the Omani revolution and maintain relations of importance for the future materiel and moral support. A remarkable example of the succes of this strategy is, that OWO continue to be a member of the Union of Arab Women, while Qaboos Women organization has been refused.

Another important aspect of the work in these mass-organizations, as well internal as external, is the educational aspect: A lot of young Omanis get in touch with the world and receive some independent political and organizing experiences.

HAUF

After only one hours drive from AlGheida we reach the end of the mountain range stretching into Yemen from Dhofar. The hills follow the coast, and the last 4-5 hours of our journey we drive on the edge of the hills, close to the sea. The road is unbelievable horible, a very uneven track full of holes winding up and down the hillsides. Many times we think that the Toyata Landcruiser will have to give up, but everytime we manage.

Its a vey suprising tour, it is sardin season, and all the time we see big sharks and dolphins cruising around near the shore. Once we saw scores of big sharps splashing in the surface, exactly like rising trout on a summer evening.

On the way we pass several small fishing-hamlets on the shore, and finally we reach Hauf. Its the largest of the villages we have passed, with maybe a few thousand inhabitants. It is situated directly on the shore, and with very few exceptions seems unchanged since the 15'th Century. The exceptions are a small clinic and a school and running water. The water comes from an underground spring far away in the hills. The presure of the spring is enough to bring water through a maybe 5 kilometer pipeline to the houses.

Many houses in the town, still lay destroyed after the heavy bombardments of the whole area in 1972 and 1975, among them the 2 previous offices of the front.

Most of the Omani families live in the hills, where the conditions of living are almost like in western Dhofar. There is no doubt that there live some thousands Omanis here, we meet them as far as 30-40 kilometers in to Yemen, and the mountain range is approximatly 10 kilometers wide.

However some families have build houses in Hauf. Its mainly black people from the coastal town Rakhuyt, while the people from the mountains of Dhofar prefer to stay in the mountains.

THE MARTYR HABKOOK CLINIC

First we visit the Martyr Habkook clinic, situated close to the border. The responsible of the clinic greets us with the words: "Long live the support committees and the Omani revolution", and tells us, that the clinic receives most of its medicine from the committees.

The visit on the clinic is very inspiring for us. The clinic consist of 7 shelters of corrugated iron and a mud-build kitchen. One of the shelters is used for consultation and pharmacy, one is used for laboratory and the remaining for patients. There are usually between 5o and 7o patients comming every day for treatment. The most common diseases are TB, Malaria, Diarrhoea, whopping cough and anemia. Severe cases are usually transferred to the hospital in AlGheida after a few days here.

2 male nurses and 1 laboratory worker are working at the clinic, and 1o days every month a doctor from AlGheida goes there with a laboratory and a transportable operation room. Also in urgent cases, fx a caesarean operation, the clinic cables to AlGheida, and a doctor goes there in the Landrover.

The Omani Red Crescent is planning to build up the clinic to a real hospital, with a permanet doctor stationed. Actually such a build up had allready started, when most of the clinic was destroyed by English and Iranian bombings in 1975. Because of this the plans were postponed, and the clinic was just rebuild like before. Close to the clinic we visit the caves used for shelters during air-attacks.

FAMILIES IN THE MOUNTAINS

Afterwards we move up into the hills and visit approximatly 15 families in the run of 2 days.

The terrain is difficult accessible, with steep hillsides, which must be climped like goats. The families live in caves. Everywhere we go there is well hidden caves. The caves are very simple, with roughly smoothed floor and the opening protected by branches and tent-canvas, in a few cases build up with stones. In a big cave, where there live several families, there was build partitions of branches and stones. The 'furniture' is simple, a mat on the floor and a few suitcases or wodden boxes with their belongings.

Further most people have a thermos flask and many have a transistor radio. The radio is an important link to the outside world in this isolated place. Through the radio they listen to the radio of the PFLO 45 minutes every evening, and follow international events via the Yemeni broadcasting and also Kuwait and other Arab broadcasting.

Its a plain, and in many ways hard life. Most families have a few goats and maybee a cow, and they receive a little money and supplies from the front. So usually they have something to eat, but it is evidently a monotoneous food: Rice, bread, fish and milk, and during the monsoon periode, when fishing is impossible, most meals are rice alone. Water is scarce, and many families walk for hours every day to get water.

In this area, the people, the Militia and the Peoples Army mix freely together, and several times we meet with armed men, mainly from the militia.

Below we bring excerpts from our conversation with some of the families:

"Long live the revolution"

A woman greets us with the words: "We are old, we are poor and we are sick, but long live the revolution - and welcome'. She tells, that they live 2 families here, 11 persons. They came from a small village in western Dhofar, where they lived of their animals. Her family had 25 camels and 5o goats, but they were all killed by the British bombings. Their village was destroyed and some of the family killed, so in 1973 they decided to flee. They walked 1o nights before they reached here, and the last stretch the area was continuosly shelled from Sarfeet: Every five minuts all the night.

Now they have nothing, but receive help from the front: Food, a little money and health service.

Before she was married, the woman was trained by the liberation army and fought together with them, while the husband have not been in the army.

"In the end the revolution will win"

In a new cave, the husband tells, that they live 6 persons there, he and his wife and 2 small children, and his sister and her son. They came from the central region of Dhofar. Before he owned, toget-

her with his brother, 2oo cows and 3oo goats, but many of them have been killed and the rest they were forced to leave behind. He was in the liberation army, and because of the bombings they decided to bring his family here in 1973, while he went back to the liberated areas.

They tried to bring some animals with them to Yemen, but during their flight they were bombed for 2 days and lost all the animals. He stepped on a mine and was wounded in the foot, but not seriously.

Now he is in the militia, and work for the front. Also his wife and sister are in the militia and before his sister was in the army. Both women are members of OWO and go to meetings about twice a month, and besides the sister follow the illiteracy class. He learned how to read in the army, and can read Saut Al Thawra, but can only write very little.

The day we are there, his sister is at the hospital in AlGheida with her son, and his wife are out with their animals(they have a cow and 2 goats), so he is looking after the small children.

He says that Qaboos is tied to the international imperialism, while the PFLO is with the people and helps them when they face difficulties. In the end the front will win.

"Its the revolution that makes the heroes"

We visit 3 families living close together and spend the night with them.

They are 18 people in the families, and all 3 men are among the founders of the revolution. They came from Nehez in the central Dhofar on the Red Line, an important strategical and political place in the revolution. It was in Nehez the front held its first congress in 1965.

Its very political people, all the grown ups can read and write arabic, and all men and 2 women haven been fighting in the Liberation Army. Today all the men are in the militia, while one of the married women is still in the army.

Before the revolution each family had about lco cows and camels, but they were all lost. Here in Yemen they have gradually been able to buy some goats, and today they have lo-2o per family. They receive

some help from the PFLO, not much, but as much as the front can afford. The PFLO feel it as a duty to help the refugees, as it is the same people who safeguarded the revolution.

One of the men tells, that his family in 1972 moved from the central area to the west of Dhofar, and in 1973 they moved to the Hauf area. They came in a larger group, carrying one wounded woman and 4 children, and they were bombed for 5 hours while walking towards the border.

Another man tells, that he married in 1969, and then in 1970 his wife went to the school of revolution and afterwards to the army, and they did not see each other for 3 years. In 1974 they moved to here and had their first child. Today they are both in the militia.

He says that the revolution is very difficult, but it does not fall from heaven it is the work of man and in the end it will win. Its the revolution, not the individual that is important. During the struggle you see people doing great and heroic acts, but it is the revolution that makes them like this.

THE REVOLUTION CONTINUES

There is no doubt, that the military setback led to a considerable confusion within the ranks of the PFLO, and also led some wavering elements to leave the revolution. But today the Front have overcome these problems and we get the impression of a strong disciplined movement, and everywhere we went we was met with a determined will to continue the struggle. And what is important, this will to continue the fight, is combined with a realistic appraisal of the situation in the whole area, and the dependency of the Omani revolution on the international development.

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